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### **Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception** *March 19, 1999*

Thank you very much. You know, this is my second public event today. I earlier did a press conference, and I like this a lot better. I want to join all of you in thanking Steve Grossman for a job superlatively well done. Thank you, Steve. Thank you, Barbara. Thank you for being there. He's come a long way since he took over the leadership of the Democratic Party, thanks to all of you, and I appreciate that.

I want to thank Roy Romer, Mayor Archer, Loretta Sanchez, and all of our other officers who are here. I want to thank Carol Pensky and Len Barrack and those who are going out. I want to thank Joe Andrew, Andy Tobias, Beth Dozoretz. I want to thank Gloria Molina, Lottie Shackelford, Linda Chavez-Thompson, Joan Menard. I want to thank all of you who are members of the DNC.

I want to thank the people from our administration who are here and those for whom they stand. We have Aida Alvarez, our Small Business Administrator; Janice Lachance, the Director of OPM; John Podesta, my Chief of Staff; and many people from the White House; and Buddy MacKay, the former Lieutenant Governor of Florida and our new Special Envoy to Latin America. Thank you all for what you have done.

And I want to say a special word of thanks to the Vice President for being my partner and being our leader in everything we have done together. This country is a better place in the last 6 years, because we've done the right things, and most of them would not have been possible if it hadn't been for the partnership that I have enjoyed with Al Gore, and I thank him very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will be fairly brief tonight. I want to make about three points,

as clearly and forcefully as I can. First of all, you know what we can do now when we're united and when we're clear and when we take a message to the American people that resonates with them. You know that no one believed that we could win seats in the House in 1998. It had only been done in a midterm election twice in this century, twice since the Civil War, and not in the second term of a President since 1822.

You know something that never gets written when people mention this: We did it while being outspent by \$100 million. Equally remarkable was the fact that we did not lose seats in the Senate, even though we had more Senate seats up and more people retiring, and just a few months before the election the other side was saying they would pick up between four and six Senate seats and probably end the threat of a filibuster so they could have all their way. You did that. We did that together.

And I want to say two things about that. First, we can do even better next time if—if—we go out and get good candidates. And I want to give exhibit A here for Joe Andrew: the Governor of Indiana, Frank O'Bannon, is here, and he won against all the odds in Indiana because he is a good leader; he is a good candidate. He was doing the right things. He succeeded a man who was doing the right things.

The Democratic Party and the Republican Party don't mean a great deal to a lot of people most of the time. They show up on election day; they want to look at a flesh-and-blood man or woman, and they want to know what does this person stand for—what is going to happen if I give that person my vote? And so I say to you, we have to be about the business of asking more and more people to join our ranks and to put themselves on the line.

If you live in a State where there's a Senate seat up, you shouldn't rest until you believe you have the best people asking for the Democratic nomination. You shouldn't rest until you have the best people asking for the Democratic nomination to run for the House of Representatives, to run for the open Governorships, to run in the legislative races, to run in all these races. You cannot beat somebody with nobody.

We have wonderful people in this country who believe as we do, who have the same dreams for America. We have got to persuade them to put themselves on the line. It's not easy to run for public office. You know, the person that I have shared my home with for over 20 years now said to me the other day, as she was doing all these calls to people in New York—I have to reiterate my statement at the press conference; I have no idea what she's going to do. And I don't. [Laughter] But she laughed at me the other night. We were talking about this, and she said, "You know, this is a lot harder when it's you instead of somebody you're helping." [Laughter] And so I say to all of you, I understand what a sacrifice it is to seek public office. And having run several times, and having been defeated twice, I can tell you that it's not fun to lose. But you can't win if you're afraid to lose.

And so when the Democratic committee leaves here with a new set of leaders—I'm glad we're putting in a slate unopposed, but we won't be so fortunate in the Senate races, the House races, the Governors races, the legislative races. And as I repeatedly tell anyone who ever asks me, the last honest draft of a politician for public office was when the Romans took Cincinnatus out of the field over 2,000 years ago. [Laughter] Ever since then, people more or less have to ask for the job.

So go home inspired by what we have done and what we're fighting for and what we stand for, and make sure that we show up in all these elections. You can do that.

The second point I want to make is this: We won the elections in 1998 because we had a message for the country. It wasn't simply because the American people disapproved of what the other party was doing; it was because we said, "Vote for us, and we will save Social Security and Medicare for the 21st century; we will be for a Patients' Bill of Rights; we will be for 21st century schools with more teachers, smaller classes, modernized facilities; and we will do the things necessary to keep our economy growing." And the American people said, "It sounds good to me. That's what I want to be part of."

And so for the next 2 years, we are going to be working as hard as we can and in good faith with the Republicans for principled compromise that reflects our values and our positions to honor the commitments we made in 1998. Make no mistake about it: We have to be caught trying hard to do exactly what we promised to do.

So if anybody asks you, if anybody asks you what the President said when you were in Washington, you tell them he said we're going to save Social Security and Medicare for the 21st century. We're going to pay the debt of this Government down to insure the health of the American economy for our children and our grandchildren for 20 or 30 years. We're going to pass a good Patients' Bill of Rights, not another patients' bill of goods, like—one more time—the other party voted out of committee yesterday, that leaves out 100 million people and doesn't guarantee you the specialist or emergency room treatment you deserve and won't protect your rights even if they're written into law.

Tell them we're going to fight for more teachers and smaller classes and modernized schools. Tell them we're going to stick up for the environment, everything from global warming to the livability agenda to make all of our communities more livable in the 21st century, that the Vice President did so much to develop.

And tell them one more thing: the Democratic Party is determined to go into the 21st century taking everybody along. We did it in 1993 when we passed, by the narrowest of margins, the deficit reduction plan that began our efforts to double our investment in education and training; that gave tax cuts to 15 million working families; that did more than any budget bill had in a long time to create empowerment opportunities for ordinary citizens, including our empowerment zone initiative that Mayor Archer has done so much with in Detroit, and that we see revitalizing urban and rural areas all across America.

And in this budget, we have the next big step. We have, in this budget, something—I want everybody to go home and talk about this. There's not a State in America that doesn't have a community somewhere that has not yet fully participated in this economic

growth. And if you want America to keep growing, we have to find new markets, and we ought to find them here at home. There are cities; there are rural areas; there are Native American reservations. There are places from Appalachia to the Mississippi Delta, to south Texas to east Los Angeles, and all across the northern tier of this country that haven't been a part of that.

Here's what our initiative does: It uses tax credits and loan guarantees and other incentives to give Americans the same incentive to invest in America we give them to invest overseas. It's high time we did it, and I want you to help us pass it.

And finally, let me just say one last point. In the last 2 days, we have had amazing things happening under this tent. Night before last, we celebrated Saint Patrick's Day, and I gave the Medal of Freedom to George Mitchell of Maine for his role in helping us to promote peace in Northern Ireland. Last night the widow of Prime Minister Rabin, his daughter, his granddaughter were here. And they said they were going to dedicate a garden at the Rabin Center in honor of Hillary and me, and they gave us a little award.

The award is not important. The important thing is that the people of Israel were recognizing once again that the people of the United States, and that this administration—not just me but all of us—are irrevocably committed to the proposition that people can live in peace together in the Middle East if they can live in justice and fairness together in the Middle East.

I just had a distinguished group of American women into the White House to see me, to talk about the problems of the oppression of women and girls by the Taliban in Afghanistan—over one million refugees in Pakistan. America cares about those women. America cares about the little girls. America cares about the male sons of the widows who have been plundered there. That's what your country stands for.

The First Lady's not here tonight because she's in the Vice President's home State, at a dedication of Alex Haley's farm, to remember the roots of 30 million African-Americans.

Why do I say this? Because when you go home, and people ask you why you're a Democrat, I want you to tell them that you're a Democrat because you believe that every responsible person in this country should have opportunity, the chance to develop, the chance to grow, the chance to live out their dreams, and because you believe that every individual can only achieve it if we are committed to doing it for each other together. That we believe in a profound way in the idea of community—not some sappy, purely altruistic idea, but that we ourselves cannot have the lives we want unless we give our brothers and sisters around this country, and like-minded people all around the world, the same opportunity.

I am so grateful that I have had 6 years, and have nearly 2 more, to fight for those opportunities and to fight for that idea of community. That is what distinguishes the Democratic Party. It is what has made America great. In some ways, it is what makes us today not only the party—as I have repeatedly said—of Jefferson and Jackson and Roosevelt and Kennedy and Johnson but also the party, today, of Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. We embody the best in America and in America's future.

So go home full of energy. Have a great meeting tomorrow. Have your uncontested election. And then go home and find Democrats who will contest the elections of 2000. Go home and tell people we mean to do what we said in 1998, and the Democratic Party is in Washington fighting to save Social Security and Medicare, to pay the debt down, to keep the economy going, and to take everybody into the 21st century. And go home and tell them you're proud to be a part of the oldest party in the entire world, because it believes in opportunity for all and a community in which we all help each other to be what God meant us to be.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:25 p.m. in the South Lawn Pavilion at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to the following Democratic National Committee officials: Steve Grossman, national chair, and his wife, Barbara; former Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado, general chair; Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, MI, general cochair-

designate; Representative Loretta Sanchez, general cochair-designate; Carol Pensky, treasurer; Leonard Barrack, national finance chair; Joseph J. Andrew, national chair-designate; Andy Tobias, treasurer-designate; Beth Dozoretz, national finance chair-designate; and Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina, Lottie Shackelford, and Linda Chavez-Thompson, vice chairs. The President also referred to Massachusetts State Democratic Party Chair Joan M. Menard, president, Association of State Democratic Chairs; former Senator George J. Mitchell, who chaired the multi-party talks in Northern Ireland; and Leah Rabin, widow of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel, her daughter, Dahlia Rabin-Pelossof, and her granddaughter, Noa Pelossof. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

## **The President's Radio Address**

*March 20, 1999*

Good morning. Today I want to talk with you about the next important steps we can take to rid our streets of gun violence and to make our communities even safer for our families. I'm proud to be joined today in the Oval Office by Attorney General Janet Reno, Treasury Under Secretary Jim Johnson, AFT Director John Magaw, Mayor Kurt Schmoke of Baltimore, Police Chief Jerry Oliver of Richmond, and Chief Robert Olson of Minneapolis, Congressman Anthony Weiner, as well as four of our United States attorneys who are leading this fight across America.

Over the last 6 years we've worked hard to fight crime, putting in place a strategy of more prevention, stricter enforcement, tougher punishment. We funded more than 92,000 police officers for 11,000 communities, taken more criminals and deadly assault weapons off the street, and with Brady background checks, stopped more than a quarter of a million handguns from falling into the hands of convicted felons and other prohibited persons.

As a result, the crime rate has dropped by more than 20 percent, to the lowest level in a generation. Gun crimes have declined by more than 25 percent. Gun murders have fallen by a third. Slowly but surely, neighborhoods once abandoned at the crack of gunfire and the wail of ambulance sirens are coming

alive with the sounds of children playing freely in the streets.

This is indeed encouraging news. But we must do more. In 1997, 14,000 people were murdered by guns. While the numbers are declining, any child caught in the crossfire of a gang shootout, or a police officer struck down by a criminal's bullet, or a store clerk murdered in a robbery is one tragedy too many.

That is why today I'm directing Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and Attorney General Reno to use every available tool to increase the prosecution of gun criminals and shut down illegal gun markets. I'm asking them to work closely with local, State, and Federal law enforcement officials and to report back to me with a plan to reduce gun violence by applying proven local strategies to fight gun crime nationwide.

Look at what Federal prosecutors and the ATF are doing in Richmond, Virginia, in an effort they call Project Exile. Under the leadership of U.S. Attorney Helen Fahey, Project Exile has used the threat of tough Federal statutes—statutes that require stiff sentences and deny bail to offenders—to reduce gun crime and take serious gun criminals off the street. And gun murders are down in Richmond by a remarkable 41 percent.

My balanced budget will help to hire more Federal prosecutors and ATF agents so we can crack down on even more gun criminals and illegal gun trafficking all across America.

After 6 years of hard work, America is winning the war against crime. But we're a long way from declaring victory. We must keep even more guns from falling into the wrong hands by requiring background checks at gun shows and banning violent juvenile offenders from owning guns for life. And I ask you to support our 21st century policing initiative to give law enforcement the manpower, the high-tech tools, and the prevention strategies they need to keep us safe.

Unfortunately, the Republicans in Congress have proposed a budget that would dramatically cut back our investment in community policing, just when we're trying to increase it. That would be a big mistake. We must move forward in our fight for safer streets and safer families.